

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 DEAE-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 IO-13
JUSE-00 NSAE-00 SNM-02 TRSE-00 USIA-06 NSC-05 OES-06
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R 180732Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 1832
DEA HQS WASHDC
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1145

INFO EMBASSIES FOR NCO'S, PARIS FOR RD PICINI, ANDARA
FOR RD WARNER

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SNAR
SUBJECT: OPIUM CULTIVATION IN BEKAA VALLEY OF LEBANON

REF: ANKARA 1019

1. NCO MET WITH COL. SALEM ABDEL BERR OF CID AND LT. COL.
WALID AHMED AL-HAJ ASSIAD OF NARCOTIC POLICE IN FORMER'S
OFFICE AT CID HEADQUARTERS ON FEB 14 TO DISCUSS REFTTEL.
BOTH ARE FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT ABOUT 100 HECTARES IN BEKAA WILL
BE PLANTED IN OPIUM SHORTLY BUT POINTED OUT DIFFICULTIES
ARAB PEACE FORCE WOULD HAVE IN PROVIDING VERIFICATION OR
ERADICATION OF PLANTINGS. NEITHER OFFICER HAD FIRM KNOWLEDGE
OF ANY OPIUM PLANTINGS IN BEKAA LAST YEAR.

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2. BERR AND ASSIAD STATED THAT THROUGH INTER-
VIEW OF AGENTS IN SYRIA AND SEIZURE OF 200 GRAMS OF OPIUM
AT SYRO-LEBANESE BORDER THEY ARE OF FIRM OPINION THAT
ABOUT 100 HECTARES WILL BE PLANTED IN OPIUM IN NEAR
FUTURE IN BALLBECK AND HERMEL AREAS OF BEKAA VALLEY.
ACCORDING TO THEIR SOURCES, 30 TO 40 TURKS ARE PRESENTLY

IN BEKAA TO HELP LEBANESE FARMERS WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY PLANTED HASHISH IN TRIAL PLANTINGS OF OPIUM. SYRIANS BELIEVE THAT EQUALLY SMALL PLANTINGS TOOK PLACE IN SAME GENERAL AREA LAST YEAR, BUT HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO DEVELOP HARD INFORMATION ON WHETHER CROP WAS SUCCESSFUL AND WHAT ROUTES TRAFFICKERS MAY HAVE USED FOR MOVING OPIUM OUT OF LEBANON. WITHIN LAST MONTH EGYPTIAN TRAVELLER FGGM BEIRUT WAS ARRESTED FOR CARRYING 200 GRAMS OF REDDISH OPIUM WHICH WAS REPORTEDLY PURCHASED IN BEIRUT SOMETIME LATE LAST YEAR. EGYPTIAN CLAIMS HE DOES NOT KNOW SOURCE OF OPIUM. SYRIANS, HOWEVER, BELIEVE SINCE IT DOES NOT RESEMBLE TURKISH HEROIN, THAT IT MOST LIKELY WAS FROM SMALL TEST PLANTINGS IN BEKAA.

3. AGENT REPORTS INDICATE THAT WITH NON-FUNCTIONING OF LEBANESE NARCOTIC POLICE WHOM SYRIAN NARCOTIC POLICE SEEM TO HAVE LOW OPINION OF IN ANY CASE, AND DIFFICULTY IN MOVING MORE BULKY CROP OF HASHISH THROUGH NORMAL CHANNELS DISRUPTED BY RECENT CIVIL WAR, A NUMBER OF FORMER HASHISH FARMERS ARE WILLING TO TAKE RISK IN RAISING MORE PROFIT-ABLE OPIUM CROP. ONE SPECIFIC CULTIVATOR MENTIONED BY SYRIANS IS LEBANESE DEPUTY AMHAZ.

4. SYRIANS CLAIM THAT THEY HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF WHERE INITIAL PROCESSING OF OPIUM WOULD TAKE PLACE OR WHO POTENTIAL BUYERS MIGHT BE FOR 1977 CROP. WHILE SYRIAN NARCOTIC POLICE ARE CONCERNED THAT TRAFFICKERS WILL EVENTUALLY TRY TO SMUGGLE OPIUM ACROSS UNGUARDED AREAS OF SYRO-LEBANESE BORDER, THEY FEEL THAT THEY HAVE NO

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PRESENT MANDATE FROM SUPERIORS TO HAVE AGENTS WORK IN LEBANON TO DEVELOP INFORMATION FIRST-HAND OR ATTEMPT INTERDICTION THERE.

5. NCO ASKED, SINCE THEY WERE SO CONCERNED WITH DIFFICULTY IN CONTROLLING SMALL CONSIGNMENTS OF CONTRABAND CROSSING BORDER, IF THEY HAD EXPLORED POSSIBILITIES FOR MORE CLOSE COOPERATION WITH LEBANESE AUTHORITIES TO VERIFY PLANTINGS AND POSSIBLE ERADICATION OR INTERDICTION OF TRAFFICKING WITHIN LEBANON. ASSIAD AND BERR THOUGHT APPROACHES TO LEBANESE NARCOTIC POLICE WOULD BE FRUITLESS GIVEN PREVIOUS POOR EXPERIENCES IN COOPERATING WITH LEBANESE ON HASHISH PROBLEM. NEITHER HAS NEWS OF OSMAN OSMAN RESUMING DUTIES IN LEBANON.

6. WHEN NCO EXPLORED POSSIBILITY THAT SYRIAN CONTINGENT ACTING EITHER INDEPENDENTLY OR AS PART OF ARAB PEACE FORCE MIGHT PLAY ROLE, BERR WENT INTO LONG MONOLOGUE ON LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY, LIMITED MANDATE OF PEACE FORCES AND

FOR CONTROL UNDER ARAB LEAGUE AND LEBANESE PRESIDENCY.
ASSIAD AND BERR WERE OF THE OPINION THAT ANY USE OF
PEACE FORCES OR SYRIAN CONTINGENT IN VARYING OR
ERADICATING PLANTINGS WOULD HAVE TO BE DISCUSSED BY QUOTE
HIGHER AUTHORITIES UNQUOTE AND THAT GIVEN SMALL AREAS TO
BE PLANTED THEY WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO RECOMMEND ANY SUCH
POLITICALLY SENSITIVE MOVE WITH THEIR SUPERIORS.

7. COMMENT: WHILE SYRIAN POLICE SEEM TO BE ALERT TO
POSSIBILITY OF OPIUM TRAFFICKING FROM BEKAA
THROUGH SYRIA, IT IS CLEAR THAT THEY ARE EXTREMELY RELUCTANT
TO BROACH SUBJECT OF UTILIZING PEACE FORCE IN LEBANON FOR
EITHER VERIFICATION OR ERADICATION WITH SUPERIORS, GIVEN
POLITICAL SENSITIVITY OF SUBJECT. DURING COURSE OF CON-
VERSATION, ASSIAD LET SLIP FACT THAT SYRIAN FORCES IN BEKAA
HAD SEIZED SMALL AMOUNTS OF HASHISH AT MOBILE CHECK POINTS.
BERR QUICKLY POINTED OUT THAT SUCH SEIZURES WERE INCIDENTAL
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TO NORMAL CHECKS AND THAT IT HAS BEEN INTIMATED TO HIS
OFFICE BY SYRIAN ARMY OFFICIALS THAT ARMY WOULD PREFER NOT
HAVING ITS MISSION IN LEBANON COMPLICATED BY INVOLVEMENT
IN DRUG QUESTION. WE HAVE NO BASIS TO DISPUTE SYRIAN
COMMENTS ON EXTENT OR AREAS OF PLANTINGS EXCEPT FOR SECOND-
HAND REPORT OF LAST YEAR (SEE 76 DAMASCUS 4323). EMBASSY
WOULD APPRECIATE BEIRUT'S COMMENTS ON EFFECTIVENESS
OF APPROACH TO LEBANESE OFFICIALS AND PROPRIETY
OF INVOLVING PEACE FORCES BEFORE CONSIDERING WHETHER
HIGHER LEVEL APPROACH SHOULD BE MADE.
MURPHY

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